



Acts 2

The Church is Born

Last week, we discussed Acts 1:1-11 where Jesus said farewell to the disciples, and He ascended into Heaven. Before leaving, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, and sent out the disciples to fulfill the mission of spreading the Gospel. We carry on this mission today as the modern church. Our one job in this life is to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus so that others may be saved through Him.

In today's session, we will discuss Acts 2:1-41 where the disciples physically receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and begin their work spreading the Gospel. This is the true origin of the Church of Jesus Christ, and this moment requires the assembly of all God's people in Jerusalem.

As Peter and the disciples preach the Word for the first time with the Holy Spirit alongside them, we find that they are specially empowered, and those listening are convicted and called by the Spirit. As the Church today, we have that same power inside of us.

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
 - What is something the group can be praying about?
 - What is something the group can praise this week?
-
- Are there any more thoughts from last week's lesson?
 - What do you know about Pentecost? Why is it important?
 - Have you heard of 'speaking in tongues?' What do you think of it?
 - What does it look like to be empowered by the Spirit to spread the Gospel?
-

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Acts 2:1-13 (ESV)

² When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language. ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

Being a part of a truly God-led church is a great blessing, but over time there is one danger we are inevitably confronted with: being a part of the kind of church where God is working, we can begin to believe that our success is due to our own ability, skill, and strategy.

Acts 2 makes it clear that the Church was born of the Spirit and the preaching of the Word. Without its guidance and power, our church is powerless. If you and your church wish to continue to be successful in everything God has called you to do, you must be led by the Spirit of God.

1. Introduced to the Spirit

The day of Pentecost is named such because it takes place exactly 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was with His disciples for forty days before His ascension, and then ten days after His ascension the Holy Spirit arrived in His full glory amongst them.

It is important to stop and recognize that the Holy Spirit arrives as God because the Holy Spirit *is* God. He is not a mystical force, an unknown entity, or an *it*. The Spirit is fully and wholly God and a member of the Trinity.

This is evidenced by the nature of the Spirit's appearing. Verse 2 describes the Spirit entering the house where the disciples were gathered as a 'wind' from Heaven ('And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind'). In the Old Testament, wind is symbolic of the presence of God. Take for instance the book of Ezekiel and the Valley of Dry Bones.

Ezekiel 37:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

Verse 3 describes the Spirit coming in the form of 'fire' ('And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.'). In the Old Testament, God is often evidenced by fire. For instance, take the example of the burning bush when God appeared to Moses. Or better yet, remember the form God took when leading the Jewish people through the desert in Sinai.

Exodus 13:21 (NIV)

²¹ By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

As Luke is recounting, the Holy Spirit is going through great lengths to introduce Himself as God.

Pentecost is a one-time event. The falling of tongues of fire and the mighty rushing wind is not a repeatable moment. It is an event that is exclusive like the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In this way, the introduction of the Spirit is not a prescription of what our church services should look like. Rather, it is a miraculous event that initiates a new age!

Acts 2:14-21 (NIV)

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in

those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

As the disciples, now full-blown apostles, preached the Word for the first time, many perceived them to be drunk. Interestingly, Peter's first defense against this accusation is that it is the wrong time of day for that to be happening! But as he continues, Peter quotes from the book of Joel to explain what has occurred among them.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the initiation of the last days and the age of the Church! The Spirit's arrival is not simply about people receiving spiritual gifts, but about beginning a countdown that is completed when human history meets its end at the return of Jesus.

When many refer to the 'end times,' they typically mean the literal end of the age and the events related to it such as the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. However, the end times are a period in time that in essence has already begun. Jesus preached the kingdom of God, and with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the power of that kingdom has descended upon the world.

By accepting faith in Christ, you too receive the power of the Spirit and become admitted into the kingdom. The kingdom awaits its full expression in the establishment of a literal kingdom in Israel under the kingship of Jesus physically here on earth. But make no mistake: Jesus is already reigning as the head of this kingdom. The world just doesn't know it yet.

This tension of the end times being here but also not yet is seen in the prophecy from Joel. The prophet mentions Christians receiving special gifts from God ('Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.') Paul also mentions certain signs that accompany the Day of the Lord ('The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.')

We as Christians have seen the fulfilment of receiving power from on high through the arrival of the Holy Spirit, a marker for the beginning of the end times. However, these signs in the heavens will not be witnessed until Jesus returns, a time which of course has not yet taken place. Paul urges us to await these signs and the coming of our Lord, but he makes clear to us that there is no time to wait: the Spirit is working here and now, and the kingdom has opened its gates to all.

2. Empowered by the Spirit

With the power source turned on (which is the Holy Spirit), Peter steps up to preach, and the words of his sermon we have already begun to explore. Notice his words in this part of the passage.

Acts 2:22-24 (ESV)

²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Notice that the Spirit is turned on for the proclamation of the Gospel message. He did not just come for the apostles to speak in tongues, but to proclaim the coming of the Savior of the world. To prove to the Jews that Jesus was God, Peter makes mention yet again of prophecy from the Old Testament, this time from the book of Psalms.

Psalms 16:8 (ESV)

⁸ I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Psalms 110:1 (ESV)

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

David predicted that his own descendent would one day sit on God’s throne at His right hand, where Jesus now sits. His enemies are now his footstool, and the basis of this victory is Jesus’ resurrection. The Jews had been awaiting their Messiah, and the Psalms confirmed that Jesus was that Messiah.

In speaking these words, Peter fulfilled what Jesus has assured us in Acts 1:8.

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”

This should be an encouragement. If Peter, who himself denied the Christ (and was even called ‘Satan’ by Jesus once if you remember!), can be empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the mission of God, then so can you today. We tend to place biblical characters such as Peter on a pedestal, thinking we cannot do what they did, but the truth is they were human just like us and what made them special was that God was in them. If you have a saving faith in Jesus, this same God that made Peter great can make you great as well.

The Spirit is available to normal people to be witnesses to proclaim the message. That message is simple: you are a sinner, Christ died according to the plan of God for your sins, and He rose again because He is the Lord and Savior of the world.

3. Convicted by the Spirit

When people talk about Jesus, the Spirit works inside that person and convicts them of their sin. This is because through the working of the Spirit, they are moved to a point of desperation. They realize their helplessness and hopelessness and are forced to contemplate their need for a Savior. Jesus says this plainly to the disciples before His ascension:

John 16:8 (ESV)

"And when he comes, he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

The response to the realization of your sinful condition is repentance. To repent is to turn away from your current sinful life towards Jesus and surrender to Him, asking for forgiveness for your sins. When that is done, people receive new life, and the Holy Spirit enters them just as it did the apostles. As the word is preached by Peter, we see this process play out in a big way.

Acts 2:37-41 (ESV)

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Salvation is offered to those from every nation, not just the Jews in Israel. We see here people from many nations being saved. Looking back at verses 9 through 11, there were a multitude of people from amongst the nations who were present in Jerusalem at the time to receive salvation as Peter preached the Gospel ('Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians...').

Because of this, three thousand people were saved, and immediately baptized. Back in those times, apparently there was no real delay between coming to faith and being baptized.

4. Called by the Spirit

The working of the Holy Spirit always leads to new life without fail. This is why the preaching of Peter and the apostles was such a success. The Spirit now invites us to spread the message of the Gospel and fulfill God's mission. This is the call of the Spirit. It is not simply to receive salvation, but to follow God with your life in your actions. Luckily, the Spirit in us empowers us to achieve this.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- When you read that the Spirit moved three thousand people to be saved all at once, does this shock you? Do you think the Spirit can still move with this kind of power today?
- Do you think spiritual gifts like 'speaking in tongues' still happen today? Do you think the Spirit still offers believers today gifts that seem 'supernatural'?
- Do you find that you don't believe you can do what Peter and the apostles did and have their same success? If so, what makes you think the Spirit can't work through you in the same way?
- Peter said that we are now living in the end times. Do you ever feel the urgency of already being in the last days? How does this perspective of living in the end times affect the way you spread the Gospel?
- Do you find Peter's strategy of pointing to the prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament effective? How does knowing the Old Testament help you make a stronger case for who Jesus is and why we should follow Him?
- If the Gospel is for all people, who are people you don't want to share it with?